Perpetuating the Academic Gender Gap

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Abstract

Women university faculty have increased since the 1970s but the gender gap continues. This paper, based on interviews with New Zealand academics and international research, suggests that family relationships interact with institutional priorities to slow women's progression through the ranks. The strengthening emphasis on peer-reviewed and funded research seems daunting to some academics, especially mothers with young children.

Résumé

Le nombre de femmes membres de facultés universitaires s'est accru depuis les années 70 mais il existe toujours un écart entre les hommes et les femmes. Cet article, basé sur des entrevues avec des académiques néo-zélandaises et sur la recherche internationale, suggère que les relations familiales interagissent avec les priorités institutionnelles pour ralentir la progression professionnelle des femmes. L'accent sur l'examen par les pairs et la recherche subventionnée sembledé concertant pour certaines académiques, surtout pour les mères avec de jeunes enfants.

Introduction

Universities in New Zealand (NZ) and the other English-speaking countries have made numerous changes since the early 1970s to accommodate rising enrolments, a more diverse student body and more women faculty. Universities have experienced somewhat different socioeconomic environments in various jurisdictions and changed at different paces, but most have created new reporting and accountability mechanisms, and have responded to rising operational costs by recruiting more international students, hiring (cheaper) temporary faculty, and seeking external funding (Larner and LeHeron 2005). Universities have also raised entry qualifications for new faculty, encouraged existing academics to obtain doctorates and produce more funded research, and some have hired research stars to raise the institution's profile (Larner and LeHeron 2005; Nakhaie 2007; Taylor and Braddock 2007; Turk 2000).

This paper focuses on the impact of gender and family circumstances on academic work, and is based on a survey of the literature and qualitative interviews with New Zealand-based academics. The international research and the New Zealand interviews suggest that universities in the English-speaking countries share some of the same practices and priorities. Therefore, the circumstances and comments of the academics participating in this study are viewed as somewhat typical of university teachers working in other English-speaking countries, although some differences will be outlined below. Similarities are heightened by the fact that many academics working in NZ have international qualifications and experience, they are expected to publish internationally and are promoted according to widely-accepted academic standards. In addition, the NZ universities continually compare themselves with other English-speaking universities.

This paper discusses the perpetuation of the academic gender gap, or differences in qualifications, working conditions, job tenure,

rank, salary and research productivity between men and women faculty. It discusses participants' circumstances and their views about the current academic environment, drawing some tentative conclusions about the perpetuation of the gender gap in these universities. The conclusions are derived from both interviews and the wider research on academia, acknowledging that this paper can only scratch the surface of this vast literature. Before the methodology is discussed, the paper provides an overview of the changing gender gap in English-speaking countries and current university priorities in New Zealand.

The Changing Gender Gap

Since the 1970s, more women have been awarded doctorates, more have become academics and more have moved into senior academic positions (Brooks 1997; Nakhaie 2007; Probert 2005; Sussman and Yssaad 2005; White 2004). Women now occupy about 20% of senior academic positions, up from less than 5% in the 1960s, although there is considerable variation by university and discipline. Senior is defined as a full professor in Canada and the United States but associate professor and professor in Australia, United Kingdom and New Zealand (Carrington and Pratt 2003; NZ Human Rights Commission 2008; Sussman andYssaad 2005). Gender rebalancing has been influenced by struggles within universities and the women's movement, by generational differences, and socio-demographic changes in the larger society (Glazer-Raymo 1999).

The gender gap has significantly diminished over the decades (CAUT 2008; Drakich and Stewart 2007; Sussman andYssaad 2005) but indicators of its perpetuation include higher attrition rates for female doctoral candidates and junior academics; a lower probability that women will work full-time and acquire permanent university jobs; lower publication rates for women; higher satisfaction by male academics with their early-career mentoring, their job security, teaching loads and advancement opportunities; and higher rank and salaries for male academics (Boreham *et al.* 2008; Curtis 2005; Monroe *et al.* 2008; Nakhaie 2007; Probert 2005; Toutkoushian *et al.* 2007; White 2004). Researchers also report a chilly climate for academic women and an unbreakable glass ceiling (Bracken *et al.* 2006; Drakich *et al.* 1991; Monroe *et al.* 2008; Settles *et al.* 2006).

Academic Practices and Priorities

Most universities in the English-speaking countries have established equity and family friendly policies but academic managers have also introduced new measures of accountability and expectations of research outputs have gradually increased. For several decades, pressures to publish have been strong in the prestigious universities of North America but they are now strengthening in Britain, Australia and New Zealand. In fact, the nature of academic work is becoming more similar as more doctoral students study abroad and universities rely on international recruitment, external funding and benchmarking (Larner and LeHeron 2005; Nakhaie 2007; Taylor and Braddock 2007).

A high percentage of university-based academics working in New Zealand have either migrated from other English-speaking countries or received their doctorates from overseas universities (Brooks 1997). Academics in NZ typically begin their careers as lecturers but can progress to senior lecturer, associate professor and then professor. The academic nomenclature differs from North America but is similar to Australia and the United Kingdom. In New Zealand's past, there was often one professor per university department with the professor serving as head for an extended period. Increasingly, there are several professors per department and the head/chairperson could hold a lower rank. Nevertheless, the rank of professor in New Zealand is equivalent to a senior full professor in North America.

Academics seeking permanent university positions and subsequent promotions must submit evidence of their research outputs, teaching evaluations, postgraduate supervision, and service to the university and profession to be reviewed and assessed by colleagues and managers. However, studies suggest that greater credibility is often granted to research, especially in the larger and more prestigious

universities (Brooks 1997; Burris 2004; Nakhaie 2007). University managers often favour research involving external partners and funded by competitive grants, sometimes accompanied by teaching buy-outs. Bought-out classes are usually taught by part-time lecturers, who include a disproportionate percentage of doctoral students and women (Bracken, Allen and Dean 2006; Brooks 1997).

Promotion and salary increases are more often correlated with publications than teaching evaluations but studies often find that women academics have fewer refereed publications than men. Furthermore, women's publications are sometimes viewed as less authoritative, especially if they are based on qualitative research or feminist perspectives (Brooks 1997; Long 2001; Nakhaie 2007). When researchers control for structural variables influencing publications (such as discipline, teaching loads and degree of specialisation) and if they include non-refereed publications, the gender differences diminish (Leahy 2006 & 2007; Xie and Shauman 1998).

Marcia Bellas and Robert Toutkoushian (1999) argue that women publish less because they work more carefully due to heavier scrutiny of their research outputs and exclusion from academic networks, but others suggest that family and teaching responsibilities also interfere with women's research productivity (Mason, Goulden and Wolfinger 2006; O'Laughlin and Bischoff 2005). Regardless of how productivity is measured, women's promotion tends to take longer than men's, fewer women reach the professorial rank, and women's salaries remain lower (Drakich and Stewart 2007; Nakhaie 2007; Valian 1998).

Promotion systems also recognize seniority within the rank, institution and discipline (Long 2001; Nakhaie 2007) but women have shorter careers because they are more likely to disrupt them for family reasons or to enter academia later in life (Brooks 1997). Men typically have more years of full-time academic employment as well as higher visibility and peer esteem (Leahey 2006; Nakhaie 2007). Despite women's longer life spans, they tend to retire earlier, often coinciding with their (older) partner's retirement.

Despite these patterns, working conditions also vary by jurisdiction and university, influenced by funding regimes, governance structures, organizational practices and cultural differences. For example, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have introduced research assessment exercises that measure the research productivity of faculty or academic units (Thomas and Davies 2002). In contrast, Canadian and American universities have successfully resisted this, aided by provincial/state jurisdiction over education which would make national ranking systems difficult.

Some universities concentrate on teaching underg raduate students while hoping that faculty will also publish. Others prioritize high-quality research by attracting internationally acclaimed academics and postgraduate students, by pressing faculty to win competitive grants and to publish in high-prestige journals, and by hiring temporary staff to teach some undergraduate courses. Historically, women have been more likely to work in the teaching universities, as well as departments that give priority to students and pastoral care (Brooks 1997; Munroe *et al.* 2008). However, the differences between the teaching and research universities may be diminishing in New Zealand, where funding regimes force academic managers to strengthen research productivity. At the same time, jurisdictions encouraging universities to hire research chairs tend to find more men for these positions (Side and Robbins 2007). Nevertheless, academics now experience stronger pressures to publish and seek external research funding than in the 1970s.

This introduction sets the stage for the qualitative interviews discussed below.

Research Context and Design

In 2008, thirty permanent academics with doctorates were interviewed at two New Zealand universities: one primarily a teaching university and the other a research university. The study was designed to investigate the impact of gender and family circumstances on academic careers, but many participants commented on other issues, including the changing university environment. This article

focuses on the perpetuation of the gender gap in the New Zealand university environment.

The two universities differ in several respects. One emphasizes its research strengths and has a higher ranking, internationally with the Times Higher Education University Ranking System and nationally with New Zealand's Performance-Based Research Fund scores (based on research outputs, contribution to the research environment, peer esteem, research funding and postgraduate completions). The second university emphasizes its teaching and learning capabilities, has higher teaching loads and a slightly higher percentage of female senior faculty (NZ Human Rights Commission 2008).

The idea of choosing two types of university was to explore the effect of research culture on academics with similar qualifications. The sample was intended to include an equal number of men and women at each university and rank. After ethics approval, potential participants were selected from university websites in the humanities/social sciences because these fields are more gender balanced than most, but also to limit the disciplinary variations. Potential participants were emailed a personally-addressed invitation to participate, on university letterhead.

Despite my efforts, the purposive sample became weighted to the research university, largely from smaller numbers of doctorates at the teaching university. Therefore, the final sample contained 30 academics: 20 from the research university and 10 from the teaching university; 18 females and 12 males; with a response rate of 73%. The interviews lasted about an hour, were qualitative, fully transcribed, and included questions about academic credentials, early mentoring, domestic circumstances and division of labour, perceptions of promotional opportunities, commitment to the profession, and job satisfaction. The analysis consisted of categorising their circumstances and answers to particular questions; noting patterns by gender, rank and university affiliation; searching for common themes; and locating illustrative quotes.

Eight lecturers, eleven senior lecturers, four associate professors and seven professors were interviewed, as Table 1 indicates. The participants varied from faculty in the first year of post-doctoral teaching to long-term academics; the age of the eighteen women ranged from 34 to 62 years compared to 28 to 68 years for the twelve men. In tables and quotations, gender is noted but personal details are omitted to retain anonymity, and lecturers and senior lecturers are grouped together and labelled L/SL, while the associate professors and professors are labelled as senior. University affiliation was also omitted to protect identity in a small country with only four million people.

Differences became apparent between academics at the two universities. More participants from the research university achieved degrees from high-ranking overseas universities on prestigious international scholarships. In contrast, most participants from the teaching university had local doctorates and teaching experience, several had completed their doctorates later in life, and most reported elevated teaching loads but held higher ranks relative to qualifications. Several participants from the teaching university had doctorates from the research university but not the other way around.

These interviews cannot permit wider generalizations but rather illustrate the findings of international studies. The next section attempts to shed light on factors perpetuating the gender gap drawn from both interviews and the wider literature.

Perpetuating the Academic Gender Gap

Research Culture and Mentoring

Research suggests that working in an academic unit with a strong research culture tends to encourage publishing (Burris 2004; Munroe *et al.* 2008) but women academics are still clustered in departments valuing pastoral care, such as social services and language teaching. These fields expect longer teaching hours and more student-related meetings, leaving fewer opportunities to specialize and complete research projects (Leahy 2006). In my study, participants from the teaching university reported less supportive research environments and higher teaching and administrative loads. All these participants had earned a doctorate

but some had received theirs in mid-career, especially at the teaching university. Previous research suggests that faculty with doctorates have proven they can do research, are more likely to view themselves as researchers, and tend to publish more than academics with lower degrees (Nakhaie 2007).

Academic mentoring has been related to research outputs, promotion and career satisfaction but the international research finds that fewer women feel they have been adequately mentored either as doctoral students or in early career. More men say that their doctoral experience was positive, that their supervisors were interested in their research, or that they published with supervisors (Brooks 1997; Carr *et al.* 2000; Seagram, Gould and Pyke 1998). In my study, the strongest reports of mentoring came from the scholarship winners from the research university, such as this L/SL woman: "I got two really good scholarships. My parents [also encouraged me to do a doctorate]. They're both academics... I had a number of mentors. I had lots of people encouraging me to do a PhD - expecting me to do a PhD."

Those who claimed no mentor tended to work at the teaching university, to come from working-class backgrounds, to mention previous disputes with supervisors, or suggested that their doctorate took too long. Here are comments from one woman from the teaching university who took twelve years to complete her doctorate: "I lost my way a little - I mean I just went off on a tangent ... I was a fairly shy student and I wonder if I could have been more forthcoming about my needs as a student to the supervisor...Financially, I don't come from a wealthy family you know, I was always working."

There is some suggestion in the international research that women who become pregnant as students or are already mothers are less likely to be mentored into academic positions (Bracken, Allen and Dean 2006). Several women in my study reporting no mentor were mothers during their doctorate. One said: "I certainly ran into conflict with my [doctoral] supervisor, especially towards the end, which I know that he wrote off as me being pregnant and hormonal." This leads to further discussion of the role of family circumstances in perpetuating the gender gap.

Family Circumstances

Research indicates that the family circumstances of academics differ substantially with more men married with children and more women single, divorced and lone parents (Fox 2005; O'Laughlin and Bishoff 2005). Married academic women are more often in dual-career marriages with older established professionals, while men's partners are typically younger with lower work attachment (Bracken *et al.* 2006; Fox 2005). Marriage can be viewed as a form of social capital, increasing networks and assisting promotion (Toutkoushian *et al.* 2007). While men's marriage to a non-employed spouse has been found to be a definite asset for salary and promotion, women's marriage to a professional man sometimes becomes a liability (Long and Fox 1995). Academic women are more likely than men to marry other academics but if they publish together, the research suggests that husbands receive disproportionate credit for joint publications (Creamer 2006; Loeb 2001; Nakhaie 2007).

In my study, gender differences were also apparent in family circumstances: more men were married or in long-term cohabiting relationships with younger partners, and more men were parents. All twelve men were married or cohabiting in long-term relationships and 8 out of 12 (67%) were fathers. In contrast, 10 out of 18 women (56%) were married or cohabiting (some with substantially older men and one with a woman), and 10 (56%) were mothers including five lone mothers. As Table 2 indicates, the higher the academic rank, the fewer women were mothers. Only two of the six senior females were parents compared to four of the five senior men. These findings confirm previous research but also suggest that a more detailed discussion of the domestic division of labour is necessary.

Academics report long working hours but women also report doing larger amounts of domestic and emotional labour. In overseas studies, more academic mothers than fathers say they are the primary caregivers of children, more women care for aging parents and other relatives, and more women change jobs for

their partners' career moves (Bracken, Allen and Dean 2006; Mason *et al.* 2006; Probert 2005). My interviews reflected these findings, with women more likely to report work-related concessions for family reasons. Both men and women talked of wives moving around the world with the husband's career. For example, one L/SL man said: "My wife has always been very supportive of my career.... She can easily find work, you know, wherever she arrives or wherever we go." Two mothers (but no fathers) negotiated permanent part-time positions in order to manage childrearing. One of them said: "At the moment everything has to fit around my family so it's a bit hard for me to think of a time when it it's not going to be like that." No men made similar comments.

Reduced opportunity to relocate for promotional positions was a bone of contention for many academics with partners and/or children. Several doubted that they could move because their spouse would not agree or their children's lives would be disrupted. This was particularly challenging for those wanting to relocate overseas but this was largely a male concern. One man (L/SL) with an academic wife and two children expressed this quite explicitly: "I've been offered lots of [overseas] jobs but I can't take them. It's not an option...If I wasn't married with kids, I would have left here three years ago." More men reported job offers elsewhere and implied that relocation to another (overseas) university would be desirable for their career.

The women talked less about missed overseas opportunities and focused more on managing their daily lives, which may relate to their household work. Men and women sometimes told different stories about household work; for example, several men but no women reported sharing housework 50/50. Even wives with male partners outside the workforce claimed that they themselves do most of the housework, including this senior woman whose partner was retired: "Most weekends are filled with housework...I come back on Monday morning and some of my colleagues say: 'Have a good weekend?' and I think: what did I do on the weekend? [laughter] Spent most of Saturday, anyway, cleaning the place, catching up on housework....My partner...would live in a tip." An unequal domestic division of labour was especially reported by women, older participants, couples where the wife wasn't employed full-time, and parents.

Several men downplayed the implications of an unequal division of labour, such as the young L/SL man who explained why his wife did most of the housework: "Her career aspirations in many ways have been secondary....and they've become less pronounced over time," mentioning that she now cares full time for their three children. A senior man reported that he did about 20% of the housework, even though his wife had a high-level professional career. When I asked if she was "ok with that," he casually replied: "Probably not entirely happy." Surprisingly, two senior women reported shouldering up to 80% of the housework but did not seem to mind.

Both men and women in the interviews talked about work-life balance but only a few men seemed prepared to reduce their working hours or delay or forfeit promotion for domestic reasons. The mothers reported far more problems with childcare, especially dealing with sick children and organizing conferences and research trips. The women also talked more about work-related stress and reported taking stress leave or quitting jobs. A typical female comment was made by an L/SL woman when she said: "For some academics...their job is their lifestyle, but that's absolutely not for me. But I can see it encroaching and I'm always trying to hold it back." Generally, academic work appeared less central to women's lives but many women also reported a lack of support from university managers and colleagues.

Institutional Experiences

Academics require confidence in their scholarship and entrepreneurial skills to gain promotions, win competitive research grants, and disseminate their research with top publishers. However, American research suggests that women's research projects receive less acknowledgment by male colleagues especially when they involve qualitative research, feminist perspectives, and projects with female participants and collaborators (Leahey 2006). In addition,

women's publications tend to be awarded less value for promotion (Long 2001; Nakhaie 2007). Perhaps for these reasons, Australian women have been found to delay their applications for promotion or apply with less confidence of success (Probert 2005).

Research also suggests that males more often portray themselves as experts and engage more in career self-promotion than women (Probert 2005). This was certainly the case in my study. Here are some comments from men about their expectations of promotion to (full) professor before retirement:

I actively work under the assumption....Yeah, I assume that I'll do well until somebody starts to tell me otherwise. (male L/SL)

Yeah, probably, hopefully in the long term...I assume that I'll get there. (male L/SL)

I will certainly have enough publications in a year's time...and significant ones - to justify a professorship. (senior male)

In contrast, women's comments showed less confidence about promotion and less desire to accept additional responsibility:

* No! I don't think I'm ambitious enough. I don't know that I can. I just don't think I'm clever enough.
* I don't really want to be in that kind of leadership role... I like contact with the students.
* No, I don't want to (laughter)...because you have to do terrible administrative jobs.
* No…I didn't start my academic career until I was 44.
* Yeah, I should be [applying for promotion] but it probably comes down to feelings of guilt on my part that I'm not working at capacity now that I have a child.

Women's lower expectations of promotion could be attributed to gender socialization, poor mentoring, less acknowledgement by colleagues, or lack of time for research. The single participants (all women) explicitly said that their marital status gave them more time for research but particularly mothers complained about lack of time for any discretionary university work.

The rapid changes in the teaching universities mean that recently-hired faculty are often the most qualified, are more oriented to research, and receive faster promotion (Thomas and Davies 2002). Several participants from the teaching university commented that their institution was changing too fast, had a high turnover of managers, placed unreasonable demands on faculty in terms of teaching loads and research expectations, and that outsiders were getting promoted faster. One L/SL woman said: "Staff are exploited here. Teaching loads are too high!" and described the politics of the university as "toxic." Here is a comment from another woman: "I had to take stress leave, and all I wanted to do was get out...And then I started to realise that it wasn't the job that was the problem, it was the management and the structures and all that, and I was good at my job. I just didn't feel it because I didn't get any recognition. Still don't."

Participants from both universities, male and female, mentioned that their love of scholarship and teaching was being destroyed by growing levels of bureaucracy and reporting requirements. As one male (L/SL) said: "I've become...unhappy with the way that this University seems to be managed these days...the creeping managerial style...What I see happening here is a progressive centralising of power and decision making...which impacts negatively on our work environments."

A senior woman reminisced about the past: "It is not the wonderful job that it used to be...there's just such a wealth of bureaucracy and there's so much monitoring and inventing justifications for what one is doing (laughter)."

University corporatization can create new obstacles for women academics (Thomas and Davies, 2002). If universities downsize, recently-hired academics without job security are more likely to lose their jobs, especially temporary faculty. In New Zealand, departments recently merged have included women's studies, European languages, education, social sciences and social work/social policy, which include a higher percentage of women faculty. The strengthening of a dual labour market between teaching and research tends to reward the researchers (mainly males) rather than the part-time teachers (disproportionately females).

Researchers have also commented on

the backlash against employment equity and family-related leave programs, with some employees afraid to use these policies for fear of losing academic credibility in the neo-liberal university (Curtis 2005; Glazer-Raymo 1999; Thomas and Davies 2002). In my interviews, several mothers reported that their colleagues ungraciously tolerated maternity leave and new mothers, despite university policies. A lone mother (L/SL) said:

> I'm teaching across six classes, initially three of those classes were at four o'clock or later. And when I pointed out that it was too much and certain times were just too difficult because I couldn't physically either put [my daughter] in child care and get to her before the child care ended cause the class ended at six o'clock, nor could I get her from school to home with the baby sitter and get back here and be in front of a class at four. And the response was not terribly good...One (senior colleague) actually said "I'm so damned tired of you people with kids" you know as if there was a choice in this...Although there is a "family friendly policy," the reality is that it's being nibbled away at the edges.

Although both universities recently strengthened their family-related policies, most participants believed that parenthood is challenging for women's careers. In addition, several women said that women scholars are still not treated with the same respect as men. As one senior woman said: "It's a bit of an old adage....that women...have to work twice as hard with a quarter of the support, and you just know that if you take on a senior role like head of school or head of department that you are going to have far more trouble from people than you would if you were a bloke."

Many participants reported that they were working harder without getting ahead but women seemed to object more than men to long working hours such as this L/SL mother: "I find myself working over weekends to live up to expectations that have been set on us." The long-hours work culture and heightened requirements of research productivity are challenging for participants with young children but particularly for lone mothers. While New Zealand universities push staff to increase their research outputs, they also provide more written criteria for promotion, special mentoring programs for women, university childcare services and work-life balance policies. These initiatives were encouraged by accountability pressures as well as equity concerns but few equity initiatives can deal with collegial attitudes towards women's scholarship, their own lack of confidence or women's perceptions of promotional constraints.

Conclusion

For centuries, universities have rewarded academics who are willing and able to devote long hours to academia, publish widely and work fulltime throughout their lives (Caplow and McGee 1958; Jencks and Riesman 1977). Under these rules of the game, more men reached the top of the academic profession. In recent decades, universities have attempted to accommodate more women faculty and help them progress through the ranks, but university managers must also deal with other strategic goals. In doing so, many universities have reinforced their commitment to priorities that contribute to the gender gap. These include hiring research stars while leaving more undergraduate teaching to junior faculty, and giving priority to funded research and prestigious publications rather than teaching.

Without being asked, most academics in this New Zealand-based study talked about rising teaching loads, higher publication expectations and more administrative work at their university. They believed that they worked hard and deserved (but did not always receive) greater levels of institutional recognition for their efforts. However, the men seemed more accepting of the emphasis on research and the long-hours culture, and more confident that they could produce high-quality scholarly work and reach the rank of professor in the current environment.

The New Zealand interviews and international research both suggest that the academic gender gap is perpetuated by both family and institutional experiences. Men are still more likely than women to work in departments with a strong research culture, receive informal mentoring in early career, have a supportive spouse who shoulders the household work, and receive peer esteem.

Universities can develop formal equity programs for hiring, mentoring and family-related leave but creating a level playing field is more challenging when personal lives are gendered and men's scholarship is granted higher prestige. As universities focus more on their research capacities and reputations, they tend to reinforce the advantage of those academics with the opportunity to single-mindedly pursue research interests that gain collegial recognition. This suggests that the academic gender gap will persist even as women faculty increase.

Table 1: Number and Rank of Participants

Rank	Male	Female
Lecturer	3	5
Senior Lecturer	4	7
Associate Professor	2	2
Professor	3	4
Total Sample = 30	12	18

Table 2: Number of Participants by Rank and Marital/Parental Status

Rank	Male		Female	
	Married/ Cohabiting	Parent	Married/ Cohabiting	Parent
Lecturer/Senior Lecturer	7/7	4/7	6/12	8/12
Associate /Professor	5/5	4/5	4/6	2/6
Total	12/12 100%	8/12 67%	10/18 56%	10/18 56%

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